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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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SUBJECT: "Hoppin' John"...Information from the home economists of the United States Department of Agriculture.

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An old Southern belief is that if you eat Hoppin' John on New Year's Day you'll have good luck for the whole year. Hoppin' John, you know, is a mixture of dried beans or peas and rice.

But it isn't just a New Year's Day dish. And the homemaker who serves it or some other dish made with dried beans or peas anytime will know she's run into a streak of luck for that meal.

Because dried peas and beans are delicious alternates for meat. They contain a lot of the same food values.

As for cooking them, the home economists of the United States Department of Agriculture have a few general suggestions. First, you want to pick over them carefully. Wash them thoroughly in cold water. Then soak them overnight. Soaking five or six hours in luke warm water will do. Cook your beans or peas slowly. Simmer rather than boil. And watch the pot. Dried beans and peas absorb water quickly and unless you look at them from time to time, you're likely to end up with a scorched pan.

Now for that Hoppin' John. To make it, cook a ham bone or knuckle in 2 quarts of water for 2 hours. If you don't have a ham bone or knuckle, you can use salt pork or hog jowl in its place. Then add one cup of dried beans or peas that you have soaked. Now...cook the peas and the meat together until they're almost tender. Add one cup of rice and salt and pepper. Boil gently until the rice is soft and the liquid almost cooked away. The one cup of beans or peas and one cup of rice will serve about six people.

Serve the Hoppin' John hot with something fresh and crisp or bright and spicy. You'll have a sure hit if you do.

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